



Past Work is Paying Off

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks have spent the last three decades reducing hazardous fuels and restoring ecosystems to prevent damaging fires. During 2002, the parks definitely experienced the benefits of this work.

In two instances, lightning-caused fires remained small with minimal firefighter intervention. The lightning-caused Circle Fire started inside the Tharp's Prescribed Fire of 1990. Due to this earlier prescribed fire, the Circle Fire only grew to nine acres. Similarly, the lightning-caused Atwell Fire started burning inside the Atwell Prescribed Fire of 1995. Again, due to past proactive management, the fire this year stayed smaller than one acre without initiating a huge, expensive suppression response. These are two clear examples of how planned burning during the last decade has protected forests, communities, and saved taxpayer dollars.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are also maintaining ecosystems and increasing cost-effectiveness by burning larger units. This is only possible because of past work. Previous small prescribed burns have already reduced fuel loads in select areas. Today, fire managers can combine these past burns into larger blocks. For example, the Highway Prescribed Fire in July 2002 was a combination of eight previous projects that burned between 1980 and 1997. Rather than conducting eight separate burns again, fire managers maximized efficiency this summer in a manner safe for people and natural resources. Since research shows fires occurred in giant sequoia groves every 5-20 years, the Highway Fire was an important link in maintaining the natural fire cycle in Giant Forest.

"It's gratifying when past work begins to pay off," says Bill Kaage, Fire Management Officer at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. "I'm confident that the work we are doing now will pay off in the future, too."



A lightning strike hit this giant sequoia tree igniting the Circle Fire. Due to past fuels treatment, the fire remained small.